



Mississippi VA

FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE FISCAL YEARS 2022-2026

1. Comprehensive Mission Statement:

To honor Mississippi Veterans and their dependents through superior service, care and assistance.

2. Philosophy:

The State Veterans Affairs Board, MSVA, is charged with assisting former and current members of the Armed Forces of the United States and their dependents in securing any benefits or privileges to which they are entitled, with operations of the State Veterans Memorial Cemeteries, operating the Mississippi State Veterans Nursing Homes, approving programs and institutions of education and training under the GI Bill, and with advising the governor and legislature on Veterans' affairs.

It is the commitment of MSVA to care for each Veteran and/or their dependents at the highest possible level of care and service. No other state agency is tasked with the comprehensive care of Mississippi's Veteran community. Whether recently separated or their service occurred decades ago, the MSVA seeks to meet their needs at the point of life they come into contact with MSVA.

3. Relevant Statewide Goals and Benchmarks:

While the MSVA's mission does not directly parallel the exact goals and benchmarks of any area listed in the Statewide Plan, several areas complement and further the goals of the Statewide Plan. Specifically, MSVA's mission, goals, and activities enhance the State's goals for economic development, education, and general government.

Statewide Goal #1: To develop a robust state economy that provides the opportunity for productive employment for all Mississippians

Relevant Benchmarks #1:

- Net job growth
- Number of jobs in each of the Mississippi Development Authority's seven targeted industries: advanced manufacturing, aerospace, agribusiness, automotive, energy, healthcare, and shipbuilding
- Median household income

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- Percentage of the civilian population employed
- Percentage of Mississippians receiving workforce training services.

Statewide Goal #2: To make available an accessible, quality public higher education or trade school that prepares Mississippians to become productive, financially self-sufficient members of society.

Relevant Benchmarks #2:

- Student graduation rates
 - First-year retention rate
 - Number and percentage of degrees awarded to adult learners who enter college for the first time
 - Percentage of state's population age 25 years and over with a bachelor's degree or higher
- Statewide Goal #3: To protect the public's safety, including providing timely and appropriate responses to emergencies and disasters and to operate a fair and effective system of justice.
- Relevant Benchmarks #3:
 - Case clearance rates
 - Percentage of offenders without a GED
 - Percentage of released offenders with marketable job skills
 - Adult recidivism rate
- Statewide Goal #4: To protect Mississippians from risks to public health and to provide them with the health-related information and access to quality healthcare necessary to increase the length and quality of their lives.
- Relevant Benchmarks #4:
 - Number of Certified Nursing Assistants working in Mississippi
 - Percentage of people receiving mental health crisis services who were treated at community mental health centers
 - Number of individuals on waiting list for in-home and community-based services

4. Overview of the Office Five-Year Strategic Plan:

The major goals and objectives of the MSVAB over the next five years are to:

- Increase the number of Veterans receiving benefits or services
- Increase availability of services to Veterans at all levels of care
- Increase the ability to retain and hire staff
- Increase the amount of relevant information provided to the public by the MSVA;

- Decrease staff turnover by finding ways to be more competitive with other public sector and private sector employers
- Increase internal and external training opportunities related to Veteran services and operations

Strategies to achieve these goals include educating the general public and the Legislature, eliminating inefficiencies in current operations, continue ongoing evaluation of working conditions, strategies, etc. and use creative and modern methods to interact with the general public to provide more information, opportunities and access to care and benefits.

Current Operations

MSVA currently administers the only four state-owned, skilled-nursing facilities (Collins, Jackson, Kosciusko and Oxford Veterans’ Homes). Each home has a census population of 150 residents. The Veterans’ Homes comprise the largest percentage of MSVA employees:

Certified Nursing Assistants	220
Licensed Professional Nurses	136
Registered Nurses	52
Administration	20
Other	216

In addition, MSVA administers two Veteran Cemeteries; North Mississippi Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Kilmichael, MS, and Mississippi Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Newton, MS. These cemeteries provide Mississippi with the capacity to inter 274,139 veterans and their dependents in perpetual care.

MSVA provides over 25 Veteran Service Officers to the Veterans of Mississippi. These VSO’s are dispersed across the state of Mississippi insuring that a state VSO is within 50 miles of the majority of Mississippi Veterans. 8 of the 25 VSOs are located at the federal Veteran Administration Regional Office in Jackson, MS. Their primary function is to handle appeals and casework on behalf of Veterans while interacting with their federal VA counterparts. MSVA also provides the training and accreditation for Mississippi’s 80+ County Veteran Service Officers who are employees of their respective counties.

5.1 Agency’s External/Internal Assessment:

Like many agencies, MSVAB has a number of External and Internal challenges.

EXTERNAL challenges and issues:

- A. COVID-19 and its impact on healthcare as whole;
- B. Fluctuation in funding and revenue streams.

- C. Changing population and demographics of Mississippi’s Veteran community.
- D. MSVAB has no/limited control over the operations of external entities
 - Veteran Service Organizations (American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, etc...)
 - County Veteran Service Officers
 - Local Non-Profit Veteran support groups
 - Veteran workforce training (US Department of Labor grant is administered by Mississippi Employment Security)
 - University and Colleges servicing student Veterans
- E. Other state agencies, local governments and private nursing homes offer much higher salaries to various staff positions. Higher pay entices MSVA employees to leave for these higher salaries.

INTERNAL challenges and issues

- A. Continued staff losses due to retirement and turnover;
- B. Salary cap that creates downward pressure on all employee salaries;
- C. Statutory limitations that restricts the collection and expenditure of needed special funds;
- D. Generational retirements and loss of historical and institutional knowledge; and
- E. Less experienced workforce, greater training demands

The following are positive internal issues that are being explored and increased to alleviate and combat the negative challenges and issues facing the MSVAB:

- A. Additional recruiting
- B. Vocation training/federal incentive opportunities
- C. Use of interns
- D. Cross training and shared resources
- E. Improved technology resources

5.2 Internal Management Systems Used to Evaluate Agency Performance

MSVA’s executive management continuously tracks cost-benefit and cost-ratio data. Constant review of expenditures by category and by division helps MSVA maintain a high level of performance on a very limited budget. Individual MSVA divisions regularly track and review costs, generation of special fund revenue, and—with the assistance of MSVA’s Financial Services Division—divisional expenditures in all categories—salaries and fringe, travel, commodity,

contractual, etc.—thereby being able to understand the overall agency’s performance with its strengths and weaknesses.

Project-by-project, MSVA tracks cost benefits and continuously looks for efficiencies. MSVA conducts staff performance evaluations regularly based on work products. Additionally, MSVA’s Directors, Supervisors, and Managers are encouraged to provide regular constructive verbal feedback to employees. MSVA tracks training and education status of its employees, and considers it a benefit to allow employees to participate in periodic continual education.

6. Agency Goals Objectives, Strategies, and Measures by Program

Program 1: Claims/Outreach-

Goal: The field representatives and VSO’s that comprise the Claims/Outreach Division guide Veterans through the processes established by both state and federal officials to grant benefits to Veterans.

Objective: Interact with Veterans in a manner that informs them of available benefits while gathering all relevant data to process the potential claim and handle all appeals arising from federal VA adjudications on benefits

Outcome: Increased benefits to the Veteran

Outcome: Increased economic benefit to the State

Strategy: Guide Veterans through the labyrinthian rules and regulations regarding federal VA benefits.

Output: Number of claims handled, appeals/hearings conducted, and claim files reviewed

Efficiency: Cost per claim

Explanatory: The premier way to measure the success of VSO’s assisting Veterans is by measuring the number of cases, appeals, and Veteran interactions which occur within a fiscal year

Program 2: School Authorizing Authority (SAA)

Goal: Ensure schools MSVA is contracted to assess are assessed in a timely manner and meet the qualifications to receive GI Bill funds

Objective: Approve IHL, NCD, OJT, and apprenticeship programs to ensure the appropriate qualifications are met

Outcome: Economic benefit to the school, training program, or apprenticeship

Outcome: Benefit to the Veteran by way of receiving a quality education at a qualified institution without having to return any improperly spent GI Bill funds

Strategy: Conduct surveys (either virtual or in-person) to gauge whether the institution is meeting the criteria for the GI Bill

Output: Approved active IHL, NCD, OJT, and apprenticeships

Output: Program approval actions

Efficiency: Federal payments to SAA pursuant to the contract

Efficiency: Cost per Veteran enrolled

Explanatory: To measure the impact of SAA, measuring the federal payments demonstrates MSVA's compliance with the provisions of the contract with SAA.

Explanatory: Cost per Veteran gives a reasonable approximation of the value of SAA

Program 3: Nursing Homes/Administrative

Goal: Ensure Veterans admitted to one of the four state-owned Veteran homes receive superior care

Objective: Maintain a profitable and financially viable healthcare Veteran-based healthcare system

Outcome: Benefit the State by attracting and maintaining residency of aging Veterans

Outcome: Benefit the Veteran by providing care which meets or exceeds other nursing homes, irrespective of other nursing home populations.

Strategy: Maintain an occupancy rate which allows the Veteran homes to be self-sustaining

Output: Occupancy rate

Output: Beds available

Efficiency: Veteran's cost per day

Efficiency: Reimbursement rate as set by federal VA

Outcome: Occupancy Rate

Explanatory: The occupancy rate speaks to both the quality of care and the profitability of the healthcare system as a whole

Program 4: Cemeteries

Goal: To maintain a cemetery befitting of the Veterans interred there.

Objective: Effectively manage the two state owned cemeteries in compliance with national cemetery standards while maintaining a fiscally responsible use of state general funds

Outcome: Economic benefit to the state

Outcome: Dignity and respect for the Veterans interred at each location

Strategy: Inform the public of the cemeteries appropriately to ensure Veterans are aware of the state cemeteries and the opportunity for interment at either location

Output: Total internments

Efficiency: Cost per interment

Explanatory: The cost per interment measures the fiscal impact of the cemeteries on the state's general funds